

Inspection of Saplings Pre-School

The Scout Hut, Birchwood Way, Park Street, ST. ALBANS, Hertfordshire AL2 2SF

Inspection date: 11 November 2022

Overall effectiveness	Good
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The quality of education	Good
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Behaviour and attitudes	Good
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Personal development	Good
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Leadership and management	Good
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Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good
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What is it like to attend this early years setting?

The provision is good

Children arrive happily and enjoy the time they spend in this nurturing environment. Staff create exciting and engaging learning opportunities, which they adapt well to meet the needs of all children. For example, children immerse themselves in a sensory activity, exploring rice. Older children are encouraged to develop early literacy skills by identifying letters hidden in the colourful rice. Younger children prepare their hands for writing by developing their fine motor skills. They use a variety of spoons and scoops to carefully measure out rice into containers.

Children enjoy a language-rich environment. Staff take every opportunity to engage children in meaningful conversation and continuously role model new and descriptive vocabulary. For example, children are exploring play dough. Staff encourage them to describe the textures they feel and the various patterns they make.

Children are developing a good understanding of healthy lifestyles. They enjoy freshly prepared meals, which are delivered daily by professional caterers. Staff supervise mealtimes well. They sit together with children and discuss the delicious food and the importance of eating their vegetables. Children understand the importance of essential hygiene routines. They wash their hands before meals and snacks, and are learning how to brush their teeth properly after eating.

What does the early years setting do well and what does it need to do better?

- The pre-school has a highly effective key-person system in place. Staff have strong knowledge of the children in their care. They use this information well during activities to support children's development. For example, staff are encouraging children's mathematical development. They use children's interests in the solar system to teach mathematical concepts, such as size and positional language.
- Children behave well in the pre-school. Staff support children to develop an understanding of their personal safety. For example, children are playing on the slide. Staff encourage them to explore what might happen if they slide down on their tummies and the impact this may have on themselves and others.
- Parents are highly complimentary about the manager and staff. They comment on the nurturing care they offer and how this supports children to settle well in the pre-school. Parents value the regular, detailed updates they receive about children's progress. They appreciate how the manager and staff adapt their methods of communication to meet their specific needs.
- The manager places a sharp focus on supporting children's emotional well-being. When children are unsettled, staff encourage them to explore 'mood jars'. They

become absorbed in the moving liquid and explore the shapes it forms.

- Staff complete regular and detailed assessments on children's learning, and are swift to identify gaps in children's development. They work closely with parents and other professionals to ensure children receive additional support, where necessary. Children with special educational needs and/or disabilities are given the best opportunity to achieve, and make good progress from their starting points.
- The manager and staff work hard to establish effective methods of communication with families from the start. They gather essential information about children's interests, which they use to support children in settling. For example, staff develop a vet's role-play area to engage children who have a current interest in animals.
- Children's safety and well-being is well supported. The pre-school has rigorous emergency procedures in place. The manager and staff demonstrate robust knowledge of these procedures and are swift to put them into practice in emergency situations.
- The manager and staff are well qualified. All staff are supported to complete appropriate level 3 qualifications while employed at the pre-school. The manager completes regular appraisals to identify areas of development, and is swift to provide training and support to fill any gaps in staff knowledge.
- Staff supervise children well. They interact with them, asking age-appropriate questions and praising their efforts and achievements. However, staff do not always extend children's learning in activities. For example, in a counting activity, children are not supported to continue the sequence beyond what they know.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff demonstrate good knowledge of the signs and symptoms of abuse. They are aware of the correct process to follow when reporting any concerns to the correct authority. Staff complete daily risk assessments of all areas of the pre-school. This helps to maintain a safe environment for children. The manager ensures all staff complete essential first aid and safeguarding training in line with local authority guidelines. Staff demonstrate their knowledge by their quick thinking and taking appropriate action during emergency situations.

What does the setting need to do to improve?

To further improve the quality of the early years provision, the provider should:

- ensure staff consistently extend children's thinking and learning during activities.

Setting details

Unique reference number	123565
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10234125
Type of provision	Childcare on non-domestic premises
Registers	Early Years Register, Compulsory Childcare Register, Voluntary Childcare Register
Day care type	Sessional day care
Age range of children at time of inspection	2 to 4
Total number of places	28
Number of children on roll	17
Name of registered person	Saplings Pre-School Committee
Registered person unique reference number	RP905249
Telephone number	0798 5968 759
Date of previous inspection	22 February 2017

Information about this early years setting

Saplings Pre-School registered in 1999. The pre-school employs six members of childcare staff. Of these, five hold appropriate early years qualifications at level 3 or above. One member of staff holds a foundation degree. The pre-school opens Monday to Friday during term time. Sessions are from 9 am to 1pm on Monday and Friday, and from 9am to 3pm on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. The pre-school provides funded early education for two-, three- and four-year-old children.

Information about this inspection

Inspector

Antonia Campbell

Inspection activities

- This was the first routine inspection the provider received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspector discussed the impact of the pandemic with the provider and has taken that into account in their evaluation of the provider.
- The inspector considered the views of parents by speaking to several during the inspection.
- The inspector looked at relevant documents, including evidence of the suitability of all staff.
- The inspector observed the interactions between staff and children during activities.
- The inspector observed the quality of teaching to assess the impact on children's learning.
- The inspector and manager completed a joint observation of an activity to assess the quality of teaching.
- The inspector held discussions with staff about the monitoring of learning and development in the setting and tracked the progress of several children.

We carried out this inspection under sections 49 and 50 of the Childcare Act 2006 on the quality and standards of provision that is registered on the Early Years Register. The registered person must ensure that this provision complies with the statutory framework for children's learning, development and care, known as the early years foundation stage.

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